

Pigeon Fever at Indian Lakes Road Facility in Fallon, NV

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Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis: bacteria which is found in the soil, is most likely transmitted by biting flies and has a very long incubation period (weeks - months). The disease has nothing to do with pigeons. The name comes from the large chest abscesses that some horses can get, which look like the large breast of a pigeon. (Also known as "Dryland Distemper" or "Pigeon Breast")

Of the Calico Complex horses gathered from December 29, 2009 – February 4, 2010, approximately 2 percent of the 1,922 horses received at the facility showed clinical signs of healed chest abscesses from recent Pigeon Fever infection and .25 percent to .50 percent showed more recent or currently were infected with Pigeon Fever.

As of March 31, 2010, at the Indian Lakes Road facility, Pigeon Fever is still noted at the .25 percent to .50 percent rate, mostly found in the juvenile horses. The incidence of Pigeon Fever at the Indian Lakes Facility is at the same percentages that exist on the Calico Complex. The chest swellings range from golf ball size to grapefruit size. Fly season occurs at the end of summer. Therefore, it is expected that incidents of Pigeon Fever will decrease over time. Disease may or may not reoccur during the 2010 fly season based on environmental factors, such as temperatures, precipitation levels, soil conditions, fly conditions, etc. It is noted that California had severe Pigeon Fever conditions during the 2009 fly season. It is speculated those conditions apply to Nevada as well.

Horses housed at the Indian Lakes Road facility that have active Pigeon Fever are being monitored. No treatments have been administered to date. Abscesses have all resolved without treatment. No deaths or complications have been associated with infection. Based on 25 years of past experience with wild horses and burros, Pigeon Fever can exist in many of our wild herds depending on current year environmental conditions.